

# Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2012

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



What Bird is that? - see page 5  
Photo – Noel Young

## TRAVELS IN MALUKU – Adventures in Evolution Geraldine Harris

At the May meeting Stuart Dashper told about his trip to eastern islands of Indonesia, the Muluka/Moluccas Islands. Situated south of the Philippines, this is a particularly interesting area because it is where the Australian and Asian plates collided. When this happened two very different worlds of flora and fauna met.

In the 1830's, at the same time as Darwin was working on his theory of evolution, A. R. Wallace postulated a theory about a dividing line between Asian and Australian flora and fauna in the Malay Archipelago. Wallace developed his theory when, after a bout of Malaria, he decided to become a collector. First he went collecting in the Amazon for about three years and then to the Malay Archipelago where he collected orang-utans, stuffed birds, skulls, and made a very good living for 7-8 years. Here he noticed birds that were similar but slightly different. This imaginary line that runs between Bali and Lombok and between Borneo and Sulawesi, then south of the Philippines and north of the Hawaiian Islands is referred to as The Wallace Line.

A clear division of types is evident along this line that divides Asian flora and fauna (deer, monkeys, elephants, bulbuls, woodpeckers) from Australian flora and fauna (honeyeaters, cockatoos, magpies, kangaroos, possums) and a lot of speciation has also occurred (the formation of new and distinct species). Stuart illustrated this diversity with many interesting slides of unusual fauna he saw on his trip.

On Mt Tangkoko, at the tip of Sulawesi, there were Elegant and Red-bellied Pitta, Bee-eaters that migrated from Australia for winter, Red-backed Thrush, gorilla-like Makuk Crested-monkeys and tiny primate Tarsiers that were like mammal frogs.

As Stuart moved around the islands of Ternate and Halmahera, he saw Ivory-breasted Pitta, Spotted Kestrel and a rare Scrub Fowl that has evolved to bury its eggs on black sand beaches. Few of the chicks survive, as human predation is a

problem, especially when the adult bird flies from the mountain to the bay to lay its eggs and has to walk the hatched chicks back to the mountain through villages.

In other locations there were rainforests and coconut plantations, owls, nightjars, hornbills, White Cockatoos, Long-billed Crows and Wallace's Bird of Paradise, Violet Lorikeets, Imperial Pigeons, Beach Kingfishers, Goliath Kukul, Brahminy Kites, Slaty Flycatchers and orang-utans.

On Buru there were Rusty-breasted Cuckoos, Drab Whistlers, Orioles, Pale Cicada Birds and Flame-breasted Flowerpeckers. On Seram there were Lesser and Greater Frigate Birds, Dolphins, Ashy Flowerpecker, Lazuli Kingfisher, Sea Snake, Seram Oriole (Jared Diamond was the first person to notice mimicry in this species where the birds have evolved to look like young Friarbirds so as to avoid attack by Friarbirds), Long-crested Myna and Oriental Hobby (the 2nd ever recording for the island of Seram).

Stuart recommended the Muluku/ Moluccas Islands and described them as "a lot closer and more interesting than the Galapagos Islands".

## **Excursion to Saltwater Track, Taradale. May 11**

### **George Broadway**

It was a very small and select band who braved the somewhat chilly weather to venture to the bush of Taradale to find there who knows what.

In fact two of us left Castlemaine to meet up with Prue Price at the Taradale springs before driving up Cypress Drive to the point where it crosses the main Coliban channel. Here we left the vehicles and proceeded on foot for a short distance till we reached Saltwater track. One wonders why it should be so named as there seems to be definite lack of salt water in the vicinity.

Be that as it may, we found as we walked along that there was a marked contrast between the two sides of the track, the bush on the Western side having been subject to a control burn two years ago.

As a result there is a considerable of germination and regeneration, I am sure that DSE would like to hold this area up as an area which has greatly benefited from burning. There were large numbers of young seedlings of Grevilleas, Persoonias, Tetratheca, Lomandra, Platylodium. Podolobium, Acacias, to name a few. Surprisingly we even found some species with flowers, albeit only very few at this early stage.

These included :- Platylodium formosum Dillwynia sericea, Tetratheca ciliata, Grevillea alpina, Correa reflexa, Philotheca verrucosa, Acacia

aspera. *Acacia lanigera* was covered in buds promising a glorious show later in the year.

To begin with the bush was very quiet, with hardly a twitter to be heard. However suddenly at one point we stopped to try to identify a bird when all at once a variety of birds appeared. They were with us there for a while, then just as suddenly they moved on. Included were :-

White-throated tree Creeper  
Grey Shrike Thrush  
Golden Whistler  
Sittellas  
Buff-rumped Thornbill  
Grey Fantail  
Scarlet Robin  
Also seen were Kookaburra, Magpie, and Blackbird

It was encouraging to see so much young healthy growth in the burnt area. It suggests that it could make an interesting venue for an outing later in the year.

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### **Announcements and discussion at the CFNC Meeting 11/5/12**

#### **“Grasses of Mt Alexander” CD by Ern Perkins**

Connecting Country and Castlemaine Field Nats together with Ern Perkins are planning a launch of this valuable identification tool on World Environment Day, Sunday June 3. A vote was taken and CFNC agreed to support this venture.

#### **Surveys of Parks Victoria's Small Reserves.**

Richard Piesse reported that Ern, Lesley, Richard and Dennis have recently surveyed and recorded plant lists for 8 other small reserves with varied results.

Two on the Campaspe streamside contained only weeds. Reserves on Donkey Gully Rd and Blanket Gully Rd contained a reasonable number of natives plants and at the reserve in Puddingbag Lane, Metcalf, 60-70 plants were recorded!

Stuart Dashper started his talk with a reminder that the **Swift Parrot Survey** is to be held on May 19 and 20, 2012 and he hoped club members would be out looking and reporting any finds to Birdlife Australia.

# Wetland Birds on the Bellarine Peninsula

Noel Young

In early May, several members spent an enjoyable couple of days birding on the lakes and shores around the peninsula, and despite less than ideal weather, listed over 50 species. Perhaps the highlight of the trip was the observation of three Shy Albatross while overlooking a foggy Rip from the Point Lonsdale lighthouse. They flew into the Port Philip entrance and joined a group of Silver Gulls diving on a shoal of fish.

At the south end of Swan bay, there were literally thousands of Swans. I haven't seen so many in one place before. At the Swan Bay jetty, there was also a very large number of birds, obviously sheltering from the cold westerly wind, including two tiers of shoulder to shoulder cormorants (Little Pied and Little Black) along the jetty rails. (Standing room only!). There was also an accumulation of Chestnut Teal, White Ibis, Crested Tern, Gannets, Pelicans, and a Royal Spoonbill, among others.

We came across three or four Great Egrets at different locations, and although they are a wary bird, Joy managed to get a good shot of one beating a retreat when we stopped the car.



Great Egret - photo by Joy Weatherill



Great Egret in flight – flight balance is maintained by folding its long neck and extending the legs behind



Red capped Plover on the edge of Lake Victoria



## Return to Forest Lake

Noel Young

In September 2010 issue of CN I wrote about a visit to a good bird spot in Brisbane. This May I managed to take in two more strolls around Forest Lake during three enjoyable weeks with the relatives. The first could be said to be a reconnaissance and the follow up with intent to photograph the tiny duck known for some strange reason as the Cotton Pygmy-goose.



The male (foreground) has a distinct white head with a black eye and bill, a thin black cap, and narrow black chest band. The back is a dark glossy green. The female (rear) in typical feeding pose, has a greyish neck and head, with a dark streak through the eye.

On the last visit (August 2010) there were none, but I noted having seen a single family with small chicks in August 2008. This time I hit the jackpot – there were about a dozen or more scattered around the lake, mostly paired, and some were concentrated on a thick patch of water-weed near the shore. The book says the Australian race is slightly larger than its Asiatic cousin, is a surface feeder, and not known to dive. I noticed

they spent most of the time moving through the water-weed with the bill submerged – I had to be quick with a shot when they lifted their heads. You can see how small they are against the Dusky Moorhen in the picture below.



The only other observations of note on this trip were three Osprey eagles circling over the point at Burleigh Heads, and a couple of Brahminy Kites on the ocean beach side of Bribie Island.

## **Richard Piesse has sent his bird lists for recent excursions in Melbourne**

Altona Coastal Park, Kororoit Creek mouth, Williamstown wetlands and foreshore (May):

Sparrows, Crested Pigeons, Willy Wagtails, Welcome Swallows and the following shore and water birds -

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Masked Lapwing        | Australian Wood Duck  |
| Red capped Plover     | Pacific Black Duck    |
| Royal Spoonbill       | Chestnut Teal         |
| Australian White Ibis | Pied Cormorant        |
| Dusky Moorhen         | Little Pied Cormorant |
| Eurasian Coot         | Great Cormorant       |
| Purple Swamphen       | Silver Gull           |
| Black Swan            | Pacific Gull          |
| Pelican               | Darter                |

Marybyrnong River cruise during March:

|                       |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| White faced Heron     | Pied Cormorant         |
| Nankeen Night Heron   | Little Pied Cormorant  |
| Great Egret           | Great Cormorant        |
| Australian White Ibis | Little Black Cormorant |
| Australian Wood Duck  | Darter                 |
| Pacific Black Duck    |                        |

From the committee:

Please note that any unpaid subscriptions after this month will be removed from the circulation list for the Castlemaine Naturalist.

Please contribute to your newsletter – any observations, photographs, or appropriate articles are always welcome. “If it's of interest to you, it will surely be of interest to others”

## **Answer to Bird Name Quiz from May Castlemaine Naturalist.**

- ◆ Baldyhead = White-fronted Chat
- ◆ Chattering Bee-eater = Noisy Miner
- ◆ Fiery Parakeet = Eastern Rosella
- ◆ Fairy Owl (and also called Crested Goatsucker!) = Australian Owlet-nightjar
- ◆ Green Grackle = Olive-backed Oriole
- ◆ Leaden Bell-magpie = Grey Currawong
- ◆ Happy Jack = Grey-crowned Babbler
- ◆ Ha-ha Pigeon = Laughing Kookaburra
- ◆ Hell-diver = Australasian Grebe
- ◆ Spotted Diamond-bird = Spotted Pardalote
- ◆ Yellow Whiskers = Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
- ◆ What's-o'clock = Red Wattlebird
- ◆ Roseate Cockatoo = Galah
- ◆ Australian Flowerpecker = Mistletoebird
- ◆ Doodle-doo = Peaceful Dove

## **Observations**

- ◆ Looking down a well-preserved mining shaft near the Dingo Farm, an Owlet Night-jar flew out and landed on a branch providing a good view for all - Barbara
- ◆ At Spring Gully a Giant Bolete – Australia's largest terrestrial fungi. Barbara brought along a web page with photos to show members.
- ◆ During the annual inspection of three Connecting Country nest boxes at Barkers Creek, one had been completely eaten out by Galahs; one had to be relocated as the large gum it was located in had fallen down; the third was found to be full of Sugar Gliders. PS.. An infrared camera captured a Tuan/ Brushed-tailed Phascogale at the same nesting box later in the week - Geoff Harris
- ◆ Sugar Gliders will use several sites at once if available. Photos have been recorded of Sugar Gliders in a nest box wrapped round Galah eggs. They both line their nests with green gum leaves - Rita Mills
- ◆ Max reported seeing a limb of a Red Gum at Powlett Hill, Campbelltown that had fallen and completely arched across the creek and re-established itself on the other side. He also reported many yabby holes in the hill.

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| <p><b>Disclaimer:</b> The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p> |
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# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## June 2012

**Fri June 8 meeting:** speaker DAVID MILLSOM  
subject "Large-scale revegetation as habitat".

**Sat June 9 field trip:** a large-scale revegetation site with leader  
David Millsom: Bradford Hills Estate

**Fri July 13 meeting:** speaker GEOFF PARK

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

### Subscriptions for 2012

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2012 Committee

|                             |                            |                           |
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